

# ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE TRACKS



*A train makes its way through one of two paper mills built on the Edgewood Model Railroad Club's train display.*

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In an unassuming building on Aberdeen Proving Ground, between a white spewing smoke stack and an old loading dock, a white side door marked with an X leads to an amazing display of miniature buildings, cars, people and an elaborate system of model trains.

Opening their doors to the public for the holiday season, the Edgewood Model Railroad Club spent Thursday evenings in December showing off their massive railway system and talented operators.

The club recently took over building E-5173 that formerly housed the locomotive shop for the railroad that once operated around the post.

With their move and the celebration of the club's 50th year, the members of the informal group decided to open the 'Tidewater and Allegheny Railroad' to the public, though hopefully not too many folks, said longest club member, Dave Renard.

While the old railroad location was good for visitors, the new club space is smaller, thus a tight fit for a crowd. Plus, the railroad the group has constructed is more for members than for showing off.

The club recently acquired computer software that creates train orders that the members spend their evenings carrying out. The computer knows what trains, stations and products the railway has, and makes the orders tailored to the rail system.

Though this activity provides hours and hours of enjoyment to the club members, Renard said, it's something that is "fun to do, not necessarily to watch."

Thus during open houses, the members show off the buildings they have created from kits and from scratch, the trains themselves, and the amazing two to three tiered landscape they built.

"The whole purpose is to try to simulate an actual railroad," Renard said.

Simulating a railroad from 1966 is great, he said, because it was an ideal time in railroading. There was no Amtrak, freight trains had cabooses and the 1950s and mid 1960s had such distinctive looking locomotives.

"We're trying to keep it authentic and to a time period," he added.

Some kit structures were "kit bashed," where the builder takes the parts from a kit and builds something entirely different. Many structures were built from numerous kits to make them fit the scale of the railroad.

As the railroad traverses land from the mountains to the ocean, as is common to Maryland, many typical area industries are found along the tracks. A Coca-Cola plant makes soda, several coalmines operate, two paper plants churn out product and a power plant makes it all run.

These different industries require different train cars, making the process of carrying out orders more interesting.

Not being bound to an actual railway allows club members to decide what industries they want to feature, and what geographic location would have had them.

Renard, a 45-year veteran of the railroad club, has seen the "very informal" group grow and shrink in membership. Currently with eight active members, the club always has a number of prospective members, all of which ebb and flow with the comings and goings of an active military post.

The club was started by active duty Army officers, who knowing that they wouldn't be around for too long, opened the membership to anyone interested, whether active, retired or civilian.

Because of the flexibility of membership, the club maintains a flexible attitude. At one point in the past they had a budget, from the civilian welfare fund, but budget cuts stopped that. Now the members just split whatever costs occur, Renard said.

This relaxed attitude is something hard to find on a military installation, according to the members.

With the lack of funding, many of the trains used in the simulation belong to the members, while some are outside donations from the community.

The group has purchased a number of new locomotives, all currently gray, which wait to be painted with the Tidewater and Allegheny colors once they are decided.

Renard is a retired DA civilian, who also spends his time teaching model railroading at Harford Community College. Many new members come from his classes there.

The Edgewood Model Railroad Club, which meets every Thursday night, not only runs a working model railroad, but travels as often as possible. The group recently went to the Strasburg Railroad, and is planning a trip to the National Model Railroad Convention in Philadelphia this July.

For such a small, informal group, the railroad club maintains a professional look. But, the railroaders enjoy their relaxed environment and look to keep the status quo.

"Somebody once asked us for our bylaws," Renard laughed. "We had to write some quick."



*Dave Renard, who has been a member of the railroad club longer than any other, adjusts his train.*

ing. Boxcars, chemical transporters and trains loaded with wood chips, logs and coal traverse the tracks on a regular basis, taking supplies and finished products to each factory.

The Tidewater and Allegheny Railroad the club built is not modeled after any particular system ever in existence. A "freelance" railroad, it was built to traverse a variety of terrains, from the tidewater pools of a place similar to Havre de Grace, to the mountains that resemble those in Western Maryland.



*Eli Sotirakos, son of Erika Sotirakos of the Science Applications International Corporation, longs to play with the locomotive that he can almost reach while perched on his dad, Peter's, shoulders. "He loves trains," Erika said.*



*Club member Dick Schwanke of the U.S. Army Research Laboratory flips a switch to avoid a train collision.*